Alabama Negroes Protest After Woman Is Killed by White's Car

By JAMES T. WOOTEN
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BUTLER, Ala., Sept. 12—About 600 Negroes held a quiet protest march here today after a 19-year-old woman was struck, run over and fatally injured yesterday by a car driven by a white man.

The march was planned after a young Federal employee was arrested and charged with murder in connection with the death of Margaret Ann Knotts. The man, Gladden Smith was released on $5,000 bail from the Choctaw County jail and, according to sheriff's officers, left town.

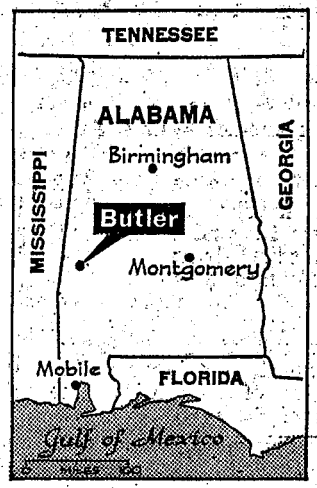
No arrest was made until late yesterday after Mrs. Rosetta Nolan, one of the demonstrators, signed a warrant and an affidavit charging Mr. Smith with murder. A grand jury, which convenes tomorrow morning, will hear testimony on the charge. If an indictment is returned, the grand jury would set the degree of homicide.

The march today circled the old brick courthouse and stopped once at the spot where Miss Knotts was injured. There, the group knelt silently for five minutes before returning to the Butler African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, where the march had begun an hour before.

Eyewitness accounts of the incident in which Miss Knotts died varied. Negroes say Mr. Smith intentionally drove his car over the young woman. White witnesses insist that it was an accident.

Black witnesses deny that his car "was surrounded and being rocked by shouting demonstrators who were attempting to open his car door," as Sheriff Leon Clark wrote in a formal press release that he said was based on eyewitness accounts.

Butler, a town of 2,200 population, has been the scene of nearly 14 weeks of organized Negro protests. A boycott of white merchants began in July and pickets have paraded up and down the narrow sidewalks around the courthouse square since then.



When schools opened two weeks ago, nearly 90 per cent of the county's 2,500 black students boycotted their classes, protesting the removal of eight Negro teachers since last March. Many of the youngsters participated in frequent marches downtown, similar to the one that ended in Miss Knott's death yesterday afternoon.

According to both black and white eyewitnesses, three of the four intersections around the courthouse square were blocked by Negro demonstrators, some of whom were sitting or lying in the street.

Mr. Smith, described as a "shy, quiet, nonviolent man" by C. D. Bozeman, editor of The Choctaw Advocate, a weekly newspaper, apparently drove without incident through one line of demonstrators on his way home after a morning's work for the United States Department of Agriculture.

At the second line, however, black youngsters trailed his car after he penetrated their group, according to the sheriff.

"After moving through this crowd at a slow rate of speed," the sheriff said, "he was pursued by the demonstrators who were beating on his car and attempting to enter his vehicle. One witness testified that one of the demonstrators was pursuing the car with an open knife. The car came to the third intersection, where he stopped his automobile until the light changed to green. His automobile was surrounded ing demonstrators who were attempting to open his car door."

The sheriff's narrative said that Mr. Smith "eased through the intersection at a safe rate of speed and ran over the deceased."

Lonnie Johnson, 17, disagreed. He said he had been sitting next to Miss Knotts and that he was able to get to his feet and out of the way of the car. "But as she started to get up, she turned as she was rising and he just hit her in the stomach and ran right over her," the Johnson youth said.

Miss Knotts, who comes from near Butler, was described by friends as a short, obese girl. "She couldn't get up as fast as the rest of us," said Thomas C. Holcomb, 19. He said he was sitting about four feet from Miss Knotts at the intersection.

J. R. McDonald, a 28-year-old mathematics teacher in the county school system, said he was standing on the left side of Mr. Smith's car. "He stopped and some of the kids got up and got out of the way," Mr. McDonald said. "He sat there momentarily, then he pushed the gas down and the right front side of his car rose up and came down and there was some kind of noise—I don't know how to describe it — and then his right back wheel rose up and he drove on off."